

PRE-QUALIFYING SELLERS DURING THE MATCHING PHASE  
OF AN ELECTRONIC COMMERCE TRANSACTION

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

5 A system providing seller pre-qualification during the matching phase of an  
electronic commerce transaction includes a directory structure 44 comprising multiple  
hierarchically organized product classes, each product class categorizing multiple  
products and defining one or more attributes of the products categorized in the  
product class. The system also includes one or more pointers for each product class,  
each pointer identifying a seller database 32 in which product data enabling a product  
transaction is stored for products categorized in the product class. Each seller  
database 32 is associated with a seller 30 having values for one or more seller  
10 attributes. The system further includes a search interface 45 operable to  
communicate, in response to selection of a product class and specification of one or  
more seller attribute criteria, a search query for product data only to one or more seller  
databases 32 associated with sellers 30 having seller attribute values matching the  
specified seller attribute criteria, these seller databases 32 being identified by the one  
15 or more pointers associated with the selected product class.